

# THE GECKO



Edition 7  
April 2015

Welcome to the April 2015 edition of the Gecko.

What do you do when it is too hot to work in the bush during the day? We go on night stalks. This newsletter is full of critters that come out when the sun goes down.

We need your input. Have you taken a photo or seen something in the bush that you'd like to share with the group? Perhaps you have a question to ask. Send it in to [fqpbushland@gmail.com](mailto:fqpbushland@gmail.com) and we'll include it in the next newsletter.

## January to March 2015

### **25 January 2015**

Our first group activity for the year was a night stalk. As it was held in the middle of a long weekend the attendance was small but that made for a more intimate event.

The evening started with watering the seedlings while the sun went down. Then we set up the light trap and grabbed head lamps and spotlights.

We were in the area nearest to Wharf Street and our huntsman spiders didn't disappoint. Even though we've held many night stalks near Station Street, it is only in the bush near Wharf Street that we have seen this particular spider. And we've seen it on every night stalk we've done here.



Huntsman spider.

There weren't any vertebrates to be seen but there was one tree in particular that was crawling with life. We could see a longicorn beetle, grasshopper, moth and cockroach all at head height. Plenty of moths and caddisflies were attracted to the light trap. We also had a lacewing and a new species of praying mantis (new to us, that is) come to say hello.

See more photographs at the end of the newsletter.

### **22 February 2015**

Our AGM saw ten members attend and all committee positions filled. These positions are as follows: Chairperson: Sian, Vice chairperson: Collette, Secretary: Jelena, Treasurer: Sara and general committee members: Barbara, Ronnie and Sue. Thank you all for nominating to be on the committee. The group couldn't function without you.

We also voted unanimously to update our Rules of Association (also known as the constitution). The new rules don't bring any changes in what we do so you shouldn't notice any difference. But they should make more grants open to us and help us stay legal.

### **28 March 2015**

We held our second night stalk for the year but in a different piece of bushland to the January activity. A variety of animals was seen on this walk and not too many repeats.

We found the pincer of a scorpion – but, alas, no whole scorpions. We wondered if the pincer

belonged to the winner or loser of a fight (in general, pincers don't fall off by themselves). And who was the scorpion fighting? On other night stalks we have seen scorpions fighting other scorpions and centipedes. We've also found scorpion body parts in a bird nest box, presumably after being regurgitated by the bird that ate the scorpion.

We had good views of a trapdoor spider as it came out of its burrow to attack a grass stem. This species of trapdoor spider doesn't have a door to its burrow. The burrow is a bit like a sock with the top of the sock just above ground level. Like a sock, the lining of the burrow is flexible and the spider pulls the top of the burrow in on itself to plug the hole when it feels threatened or wants to keep the humidity higher in its home.



Trapdoor spider.

Other spiders were seen and they brought up a new question. When we started doing night stalks in 2010 we would have to dodge the orb-weaving spiders that built their webs across the paths. A few years later the spiders stopped building their webs across the paths. About the same time we started seeing bats. We had a hypothesis that saw the spiders changing their web location to avoid being eaten by the bats – the spiders were sitting ducks in the open over the paths.

For the last few years we have seen bats but no spiders across the paths. However, on this night stalk, the spiders were back building their webs across the paths. And we didn't see any bats! Do the spiders know when the bats are around? How do they know this? Perhaps the spiders can hear the

bats hunting calls and know that it is dangerous to be out in the open.



A spider building its web across the path.

There was also something new to see at the light trap – ants. There were about a dozen big ants on the sheet and they seemed to be taking advantage of the insects that had been attracted to our light. A number of them were seen carrying off moths. Three ants were trying to get a honeybee down to the ground but they didn't appear to be very coordinated. Each one seemed to want to take a different way down.



An ant carries away its prize.

See more photographs at the end of the newsletter.

A big **THANK YOU** goes to Ash, Barbara M, Bev, Collette, Jelena, Lee, Peter, Ronnie, Rosemary, Sara, Sian and Sue for helping out with these activities.

And an extra special thank you goes to Rosemary who, without fail, brings along something yummy to share with the group at the end of the activity to have with our cuppa. Thank you Rosemary.

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## Upcoming events

April – Weeding

May – Weeding

June – To be advised

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## Also this quarter

**Assessment and treatment** of the bushland for *Phytophthora dieback* happened during February. This project is supported by funding from the Western Australian Government's State NRM Program.

*Phytophthora* (Greek for Plant Destroyer) dieback is a condition caused by an introduced organism from the *Phytophthora* genus. There are many species of *Phytophthora* but the one that causes the most problem in the bushland is *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

The organism is a root rotting water mould that lives in the soil. It attacks susceptible plant roots and makes it impossible for the plant to absorb food and water. This quickly leads to the death of the plant involved. 40% of all native plants in the southwest of WA are *Phytophthora* hosts and many introduced plants are also killed by *Phytophthora*.

To treat the condition Glenn, from Dieback Treatment Services, who is an accredited disease interpreter, first visually assesses the area and takes samples of any suspicious plant deaths for laboratory testing. Using the condition of plants susceptible to *Phytophthora*, Glenn determines if an area appears free from disease, is diseased or is uninterpretable.

Soil samples are taken where there is the death of a plant that looks like a victim of *Phytophthora*. Fortunately our sample came back negative.



A soil sample is taken from under a dead grass tree.

Those susceptible plants in diseased areas are then treated with phosphite. Phosphite is known to strengthen the plant's defences against *Phytophthora*. But that boost only lasts for about three years, after which the plants need to be retreated. If the plant is a tree it receives the phosphite through injections into its trunk. If the plant is a shrub it receives a foliar spray of phosphite.



A tree gets its phosphite injections.

An uninterpretable area of bushland is where there are no, or few, susceptible plants growing. Without susceptible plants, you can't decide from a visual assessment if the plants are not there because they've been killed by *Phytophthora*, killed by something else or were never there in the first place. Where healthy bushland meets an uninterpretable area all plants along that meeting edge are treated.

*Phytophthora* is found in the soil and in infected plants' roots. It can spread either plant-to-plant, where an infected root of one plant touches a root of another, through the movement of soil, infected mulch or even infected water sources.

We can help minimise the spread of *Phytophthora* by making sure that we don't spread soil from one area to another. This is done by:

- Staying on the paths when conditions are wet and warm and the soil is sticky,
- removing soil from our shoes, gloves and tools whenever we move from one area to another and spraying with a 1/3 mix of methylated spirits and water,
- making sure that the soil attached to weeds doesn't dislodge and fall to a new patch of ground (it is best to bag the weeds straight away and dispose in landfill or a hot compost), and
- taking care that soil isn't spread on the feet of our pets (keep them on a lead and on the path).

*Phytophthora* can also kill garden plants so these precautions apply to your home as well as the bushland. More information can be found at the dieback working group's website at [www.dwg.org.au](http://www.dwg.org.au)

**The bushland volunteers** in the City of Canning held a lunch for the City staff who help us in our endeavours. The lunch was initially organised as a goodbye lunch because a number of the City's groups would be under different local governments after the local government amalgamations. But it became a thank you lunch after the amalgamations were cancelled.

Held at the Shelley Sailing Club, each group spoke about the help they'd received and warm regard they had for the staff at the City of Canning. It was evident that helping the bushland was not just a job for those working with the City of Canning, it was a calling. And we are daily grateful for the passion they share with us.



The staff from the City of Canning.

**A new wetland system** has been developed in one of our reserves. In what turned out to be a bureaucratic nightmare for Terry Thompson, Senior Landscape Architect at the City of Canning, we will now receive stormwater runoff from the new development along Whitlock Road to reinvigorate the historically damp area near the Neighbourhood Centre.

The dampland was suffering from a lack of water due to a number of reasons and instead of letting the area succumb to drought we saw an opportunity to use a waste product (storm water runoff) in our bushland.

As the housing development was at the very early stages when this plan was hatched, it was relatively easy for the developers to change their drainage plans. Instead of joining into the main storm water drain, the development's drainage was piped along the access track surrounding the bushland and ends in a bubble-up pit close to the dampland.



Stormwater pipes are laid from the housing development to the bushland.

A small depression has been constructed around the bubble-up pit where rubbish in the system should accumulate. Water will then flow along a swale to a larger depression. As this depression fills the water will gradually seep into the surrounding soil and replenish the dampland.



The bubble-up pit is installed.

While the area should be planted out this coming winter, it won't be until the housing development has been completed that we get the full effect of their runoff. In the meantime, the plants will have time to establish and start to bring some life back to the area.



Sculpting the larger depression.



Our thanks go to Terry, Colin and many others at the City of Canning, Karl from Urban Ecosystems and Shaun from A Bobcat Service for making this dream a reality.

# Photographs from the night stalks



